



EVERYTHING IS A GRASSHOPPER

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Some children are very adventuresome in trying new foods; others are not. Children “check out” new foods in different ways. More cautious children may first watch us eating the foods, may pick it up and drop it on the floor or feed the dog. They may squish it between their fingers or put it in their mouth and spit it out. To get to a personal comfort level with new flavors and textures, children follow their own individualized exploration techniques. They are much more willing to try new things if they are allowed to explore at their own pace.

I was personally reminded of this exploration process recently. My family spent a month in Oaxaca, Mexico living with a local family and studying Spanish at a language school. Just before we left, our host family proudly presented us with a going away meal. One of the central offerings was a new dish that we had not previously tried. I asked our host mother “what is this new dish?” in my newly learned Spanish. She told me enthusiastically that it was “champolinas” which I determined from my handy dandy Spanish-English dictionary to be “grasshoppers”! Now, I am an adventuresome eater and do love to try new things, but....grasshoppers!? As I looked into the bowl I could clearly see “parts”.....grasshopper parts.....identifiable parts.....legs..... bodies.... heads.... antennae!!!! I realized that all of a sudden I had become a CAUTIOUS EATER! At least, I was CAUTIOUS about the bowl of “parts” in front of me!!

Interestingly, I noticed I explored this new food in ways quite similar to the approaches used by our cautious eaters. First, I watched our host mother eating them. She spread a tortilla with a pile of guacamole and then liberally sprinkled grasshopper (parts) all over it. She folded the tortilla and took a bite. She not only survived, but she smiled and clearly ENJOYED it. I knew she had gone to the personal trouble and expense to provide us with this delicacy and I needed to be polite and eat some. But, I also knew I was not capable of just taking a mouthful! I needed to check them out.....slowly. I held the bowl of grasshoppers, studied them, and then brought it close enough to smell it. They were fried and smelled like garlic. Well, okay, garlic is familiar and I like garlic.....I poked around the bowl with a finger and nothing jumped out at me...so they were NOT alive!! So far, so good.....

In imitation of our host mother, I took a tortilla, spread it liberally with guacamole, and buried a tiny pinch of grasshopper (a “part or two”) into my green mixture. I folded the tortilla and cautiously bit into it. It tasted like (surprise) guacamole, something familiar! I survived! Nothing was jumping around in my stomach! I repeated this sequence throughout the meal with more and more grasshopper each time and, gradually felt the texture, heard the crunch as I bit into it, and tasted the garlic! I actually, with time, began to enjoy them and left the meal with the knowledge that I had tried, survived, and even enjoyed grasshoppers.....real grasshoppers.

Think about the cautious children we know. Many of them have had limited or worrisome experiences with foods and we, as supportive grown ups in their lives, want them to try new things. We cavalierly offer new flavors and tastes each day. Remember that to the cautious child “Everything is a grasshopper!!” Allow the child the time it takes to become familiar and even friendly with these new food flavors and textures. I guarantee, if someone had put a mouthful of grasshoppers in my mouth while I was being nervous and cautious, I would have gagged....or even vomited. And, at the least, I would NEVER have tried them again. But given the opportunity to explore and try them at my own pace, I now have a new food in my list of enjoyed foods. I will even try them again--next time I have the chance!